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LARA,

A TALE.

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JACQUELINE,

A TALE.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. MURRAY, ALBEMARLE-STREET,
By T. Davison, Whitefriars.

1814.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

The reader of LARA may probably regard it as a sequel to a poem that recently appeared: whether the cast of the hero's character, the turn of his adventures, and the general outline and colouring of the story, may not encourage such a supposition, shall be left to his determination. To his conjecture is also referred the name of the writer, the knowledge of which would be of no service in assisting his decision on the failure or success of the attempt.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Poem of JACQUELINE is the production of a different author, and is added at the request of the writer of the former tale, whose wish and entreaty it was that it should occupy the first pages of the following volume; and he regrets that the tenacious courtesy of his friend would not permit him to place it where the judgment of the reader, concurring with his own, will suggest its more appropriate station.

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NOTE.

Canto I. page 3, line 1.

The Serfs are glad through Lara's wide domain.

"The reader is advertised that the name only of Lara being Spanish, and no circumstance of local or national description fixing the scene or hero of the poem to any country or age, the word '*Serf*,' which could not be correctly applied to the lower classes in Spain, who were never vassals of the soil, has nevertheless been employed to designate the followers of our fictitious chieftain."

LARA,

A TALE.

CANTO I.

LARA.

CANTO I.

I.

The Serfs are glad through Lara's wide domain,
And Slavery half forgets her feudal chain;
He, their unhop'd, but unforgotten lord,
The long self-exiled chieftain is restored:
There be bright faces in the busy hall,
Bowls on the board, and banners on the wall;
Far chequering o'er the pictured window plays
The unwonted faggots' hospitable blaze;

And gay retainers gather round the hearth
With tongues all loudness, and with eyes all mirth.

II.

The chief of Lara is returned again:
And why had Lara cross'd the bounding main?
Left by his sire, too young such loss to know,
Lord of himself;—that heritage of woe,
That fearful empire which the human breast
But holds to rob the heart within of rest!—
With none to check, and few to point in time
The thousand paths that slope the way to crime;
Then, when he most required commandment, then
Had Lara's daring boyhood govern'd men.
It skills not, boots not step by step to trace
His youth through all the mazes of its race;

Short was the course his restlessness had run,
But long enough to leave him half undone.

III.

And Lara left in youth his father-land;
But from the hour he waved his parting hand
Each trace wax'd fainter of his course, till all
Had nearly ceased his memory to recall.
His sire was dust, his vassals could declare,
'Twas all they knew, that Lara was not there;
Nor sent, nor came he, till conjecture grew
Cold in the many, anxious in the few.
His hall scarce echoes with his wonted name,
His portrait darkens in its fading frame,
Another chief consoled his destined bride,
The young forgot him, and the old had died;

"Yet doth he live!" exclaims the impatient heir,
And sighs for sables which he must not wear.
A hundred scutcheons deck with gloomy grace
The Laras' last and longest dwelling place;
But one is absent from the mouldering file
That now were welcome in that Gothic pile.

IV.

He comes at last in sudden loneliness,
And whence they know not, why they need not guess;
They more might marvel, when the greeting's o'er,
Not that he came, but came not long before:
No train is his beyond a single page,
Of foreign aspect, and of tender age.
Years had roll'd on, and fast they speed away
To those that wander as to those that stay;

But lack of tidings from another clime
Had lent a flagging wing to weary Time.
They see, they recognise, yet almost deem
The present dubious, or the past a dream.

He lives, nor yet is past his manhood's prime,
Though seared by toil, and something touch'd by time;
His faults, whate'er they were, if scarce forgot,
Might be untaught him by his varied lot;
Nor good nor ill of late were known, his name
Might yet uphold his patrimonial fame.
His soul in youth was haughty, but his sins
No more than pleasure from the stripling wins;
And such, if not yet harden'd in their course,
Might be redeem'd, nor ask a long remorse.

V

And they indeed were changed—'tis quickly seen
Whate'er he be, 'twas not what he had been;
That brow in furrow'd lines had fix'd at last,
And spake of passions, but of passion past;
The pride, but not the fire, of early days,
Coldness of mien, and carelessness of praise;
A high demeanour, and a glance that took
Their thoughts from others by a single look;
And that sarcastic levity of tongue,
The stinging of a heart the world hath stung,
That darts in seeming playfulness around,
And makes those feel that will not own the wound;
All these seem'd his, and something more beneath
Than glance could well reveal, or accent breathe.
Ambition, glory, love, the common aim
That some can conquer, and that all would claim,

Within his breast appear'd no more to strive,
Yet seem'd as lately they had been alive;
And some deep feeling it were vain to trace
At moments lighten'd o'er his livid face.

VI.

Not much he lov'd long question of the past,
Nor told of wondrous wilds, and desarts vast
In those far lands where he had wandered lone,
And—as himself would have it seem—unknown:
Yet these in vain his eye could scarcely scan
Nor glean experience from his fellow man;
But what he had beheld he shunn'd to show,
As hardly worth a stranger's care to know;
If still more prying such enquiry grew,
His brow fell darker, and his words more few.

VII.

Not unrejoiced to see him once again,
Warm was his welcome to the haunts of men;
Born of high lineage, link'd in high command,
He mingled with the Magnates of his land;
Join'd the carousals of the great and gay,
And saw them smile or sigh their hours away;
But still he only saw, and did not share
The common pleasure or the general care;
He did not follow what they all pursued
With hope still baffled, still to be renew'd;
Nor shadowy honour, nor substantial gain,
Nor beauty's preference, and the rival's pain:
Around him some mysterious circle thrown
Repell'd approach, and showed him still alone;
Upon his eye sate something of reproof,
That kept at least frivolity aloof;

And things more timid that beheld him near,
In silence gaz'd, or whisper'd mutual fear;
And they the wiser, friendlier few confess'd
They deem'd him better than his air express'd.

VIII.

'Twas strange—in youth all action and all life,
Burning for pleasure, not averse from strife;
Woman—the field—the ocean—all that gave
Promise of gladness, peril of a grave,
In turn he tried—he ransack'd all below,
And found his recompence in joy or woe,
No tame, trite medium; for his feelings sought
In that intenseness an escape from thought:
The tempest of his heart in scorn had gazed
On that the feebler elements hath rais'd;

The rapture of his heart had look'd on high,
And ask'd if greater dwelt beyond the sky:
Chain'd to excess, the slave of each extreme,
How woke he from the wildness of that dream?
Alas! he told not—but he did awake
To curse the wither'd heart that would not break.

IX.

Books, for his volume heretofore was Man,
With eye more curious he appear'd to scan,
And oft in sudden mood for many a day
From all communion he would start away:
And then, his rarely call'd attendants said,
Through night's long hours would sound his hurried tread
O'er the dark gallery, where his fathers frown'd
In rude but antique portraiture around.

They heard, but whisper'd—"*that* must not be known—

"The sound of words less earthly than his own.

"Yes, they who chose might smile, but some had seen

"They scarce knew what, but more than should have been.

"Why gaz'd he so upon the ghastly head

"Which hands profane had gather'd from the dead,

"That still beside his open'd volume lay,

"As if to startle all save him away?

"Why slept he not when others were at rest?

"Why heard no music, and received no guest?

"All was not well they deemed—but where the wrong?

"Some knew perchance—but 'twere a tale too long;

"And such besides were too discreetly wise,

"To more than hint their knowledge in surmise;

" But if they would—they could"—around the board
Thus Lara's vassals prattled of their lord.

X.

It was the night—and Lara's glassy stream
The stars are studding, each with imaged beam:
So calm, the waters scarcely seem to stray,
And yet they glide like happiness away;
Reflecting far and fairy-like from high
The immortal lights that live along the sky:
Its banks are fringed with many a goodly tree,
And flowers the fairest that may feast the bee;
Such in her chaplet infant Dian wove,
And Innocence would offer to her love.
These deck the shore; the waves their channel make
In windings bright and mazy like the snake.

All was so still, so soft in earth and air,
You scarce would start to meet a spirit there;
Secure that nought of evil could delight
To walk in such a scene, on such a night!
It was a moment only for the good:
So Lara deemed, nor longer there he stood,
But turned in silence to his castle-gate;
Such scene his soul no more could contemplate:
Such scene reminded him of other days,
Of skies more cloudless, moons of purer blaze,
Of nights more soft and frequent, hearts that now—
No—no—the storm may beat upon his brow,
Unfelt—unsparing—but a night like this,
A night of beauty mock'd such breast as his.

XI.

He turned within his solitary hall,
And his high shadow shot along the wall;
There were the painted forms of other times,
'Twas all they left of virtues or of crimes,
Save vague tradition; and the gloomy vaults
That hid their dust, their foibles, and their faults;
And half a column of the pompous page,
That speeds the specious tale from age to age;
Where history's pen its praise or blame supplies,
And lies like truth, and still most truly lies.
He wandering mused, and as the moonbeam shone
Through the dim lattice o'er the floor of stone,
And the high fretted roof, and saints, that there
O'er Gothic windows knelt in pictured prayer,
Reflected in fantastic figures grew,
Like life, but not like mortal life, to view;

His bristling locks of sable, brow of gloom,
And the wide waving of his shaken plume
Glanced like a spectre's attributes, and gave
His aspect all that terror gives the grave.

XII.

'Twas midnight—all was slumber; the lone light
Dimm'd in the lamp, as loth to break the night.
Hark! there be murmurs heard in Lara's hall—
A sound—a voice—a shriek—a fearful call!
A long, loud shriek—and silence—did they hear
That frantic echo burst the sleeping ear?
They heard and rose, and tremulously brave
Rush where the sound invoked their aid to save;
They come with half-lit tapers in their hands,
And snatch'd in startled haste unbelted brands.

XIII.

Cold as the marble where his length was laid,
Pale as the beam that o'er his features played,
Was Lara stretch'd; his half drawn sabre near,
Dropp'd it should seem in more than nature's fear;
Yet he was firm, or had been firm till now,
And still defiance knit his gathered brow;
Though mix'd with terror, senseless as he lay,
There lived upon his lip the wish to slay;
Some half form'd threat in utterance there had died,
Some imprecation of despairing pride;
His eye was almost seal'd, but not forsook,
Even in its trance the gladiator's look,
That oft awake his aspect could disclose,
And now was fix'd in horrible repose.

They raise him—bear him;—hush! he breathes, he speaks,
The swarthy blush recolours in his cheeks,
His lip resumes its red, his eye, though dim,
Rolls wide and wild, each slowly quivering limb
Recalls its function, but his words are strung
In terms that seem not of his native tongue;
Distinct but strange, enough they understand
To deem them accents of another land,
And such they were, and meant to meet an ear
That hears him not—alas! that cannot hear!

XIV.

His page approach'd, and he alone appear'd
To know the import of the words they heard;
And by the changes of his cheek and brow
They were not such as Lara should avow,

Nor he interpret, yet with less surprise
Than those around their chieftain's state he eyes,
But Lara's prostrate form he bent beside,
And in that tongue which seem'd his own replied,
And Lara heeds those tones that gently seem
To soothe away the horrors of his dream;
If dream it were, that thus could overthrow
A breast that needed not ideal woe.

XV.

Whate'er his phrenzy dream'd or eye beheld,
If yet remember'd ne'er to be reveal'd,
Rests at his heart: the custom'd morning came,
And breath'd new vigour in his shaken frame;
And solace sought he none from priest nor leech,
And soon the same in movement and in speech

As heretofore he fill'd the passing hours,
Nor less he smiles, nor more his forehead lours
Than these were wont; and if the coming night
Appear'd less welcome now to Lara's sight,
He to his marvelling vassals show'd it not,
Whose shuddering prov'd *their* fear was less forgot.
In trembling pairs (alone they dared not) crawl
The astonish'd slaves, and shun the fated hall;
The waving banner, and the clapping door,
The rustling tapestry, and the echoing floor;
The long dim shadows of surrounding trees,
The flapping bat, the night song of the breeze;
Aught they behold or hear their thought appals
As evening saddens o'er the dark grey walls.

XVI.

Vain thought! that hour of ne'er unravell'd gloom
Came not again, or Lara could assume
A seeming of forgetfulness that made
His vassals more amaz'd nor less afraid—
Had memory vanish'd then with sense restored?
Since word, nor look, nor gesture of their lord
Betrayed a feeling that recalled to these
That fevered moment of his mind's disease.
Was it a dream? was his the voice that spoke
Those strange wild accents; his the cry that broke
Their slumber? his the oppress'd o'er-laboured heart
That ceased to beat, the look that made them start?
Could he who thus had suffered, so forget
When such as saw that suffering shudder yet?
Or did that silence prove his memory fix'd
Too deep for words, indelible, unmix'd

In that corroding secrecy which gnaws
The heart to show the effect, but not the cause?
Not so in him; his breast had buried both,
Nor common gazers could discern the growth
Of thoughts that mortal lips must leave half told;
They choak the feeble words that would unfold.

XVII.

In him inexplicably mix'd appeared
Much to be loved and hated, sought and feared;
Opinion varying o'er his hidden lot,
In praise or railing ne'er his name forgot;
His silence formed a theme for others' prate—
They guess'd—they gazed—they fain would know his fate.
What had he been? what was he, thus unknown,
Who walked their world, his lineage only known?

A hater of his kind? yet some would say,
With them he could seem gay amidst the gay;
But own'd, that smile if oft observed and near,
Waned in its mirth and withered to a sneer;
That smile might reach his lip, but passed not by,
None e'er could trace its laughter to his eye:
Yet there was softness too in his regard,
At times, a heart as not by nature hard,
But once perceiv'd, his spirit seem'd to chide
Such weakness, as unworthy of its pride,
And steel'd itself, as scorning to redeem
One doubt from others half withheld esteem;
In self-inflicted penance of a breast
Which tenderness might once have wrung from rest;
In vigilance of grief that would compel
The soul to hate for having lov'd too well.

XVIII.

There was in him a vital scorn of all:
As if the worst had fall'n which could befall
He stood a stranger in this breathing world,
An erring spirit from another hurled;
A thing of dark imaginings, that shaped
By choice the perils he by chance escaped;
But 'scaped in vain, for in their memory yet
His mind would half exult and half regret:
With more capacity for love than earth
Bestows on most of mortal mould and birth,
His early dreams of good outstripp'd the truth,
And troubled manhood followed baffled youth;
With thought of years in phantom chace mispent,
And wasted powers for better purpose lent;
And fiery passions that had poured their wrath
In hurried desolation o'er his path,

And left the better feelings all at strife.
In wild reflection o'er his stormy life;
But haughty still, and loth himself to blame,
He called on Nature's self to share the shame,
And charged all faults upon the fleshly form
She gave to clog the soul, and feast the worm;
'Till he at last confounded good and ill,
And half mistook for fate the acts of will:
Too high for common selfishness, he could
At times resign his own for others' good,
But not in pity, not because he ought,
But in some strange perversity of thought,
That swayed him onward with a secret pride
To do what few or none would do beside;
And this same impulse would in tempting time
Mislead his spirit equally to crime;

So much he soared beyond, or sunk beneath
The men with whom he felt condemned to breathe,
And longed by good or ill to separate
Himself from all who shared his mortal state;
His mind abhorring this had fixed her throne
Far from the world, in regions of her own;
Thus coldly passing all that passed below,
His blood in temperate seeming now would flow:
Ah! happier if it ne'er with guilt had glowed,
But ever in that icy smoothness flowed!
'Tis true, with other men their path he walked,
And like the rest in seeming did and talked,
Nor outraged Reason's rules by flaw nor start,
His madness was not of the head, but heart;
And rarely wandered in his speech, or drew
His thoughts so forth as to offend the view.

XIX.

With all that chilling mystery of mien,
And seeming gladness to remain unseen;
He had (if 'twere not nature's boon) an art
Of fixing memory on another's heart:
It was not love perchance—nor hate—nor aught
That words can image to express the thought;
But they who saw him did not see in vain,
And once beheld, would ask of him again:
And those to whom he spake remembered well,
And on the words, however light, would dwell.
None knew, nor how, nor why, but he entwined
Himself perforce around the hearer's mind;
There he was stamp'd, in liking, or in hate,
If greeted once; however brief the date
That friendship, pity, or aversion knew,
Still there within the inmost thought he grew.

You could not penetrate his soul, but found,
Despite your wonder, to your own he wound;
His presence haunted still; and from the breast
He forced an all unwilling interest;
Vain was the struggle in that mental net,
His spirit seemed to dare you to forget!

XX.

There is a festival, where knights and dames,
And aught that wealth or lofty lineage claims
Appear—a highborn and a welcomed guest
To Otho's hall came Lara with the rest.
The long carousal shakes the illumin'd hall,
Well speeds alike the banquet and the ball;
And the gay dance of bounding Beauty's train
Links grace and harmony in happiest chain:

Blest are the early hearts and gentle hands
That mingle there in well according bands;
It is a sight the careful brow might smoothe,
And make Age smile, and dream itself to youth,
And Youth forget such hour was past on earth,
So springs the exulting bosom to that mirth!

XXI.

And Lara gaz'd on these sedately glad,
His brow belied him if his soul was sad,
And his glance followed fast each fluttering fair,
Whose steps of lightness woke no echo there:
He lean'd against the lofty pillar nigh
With folded arms and long attentive eye,
Nor mark'd a glance so sternly fix'd on his,
Ill brook'd high Lara scrutiny like this:

At length he caught it, 'tis a face unknown,
But seems as searching his, and his alone;
Prying and dark, a stranger's by his mien,
Who still till now had gaz'd on him unseen;
At length encountering meets the mutual gaze
Of keen enquiry, and of mute amaze;
On Lara's glance emotion gathering grew,
As if distrusting that the stranger threw;
Along the stranger's aspect fix'd and stern
Flash'd more than thence the vulgar eye could learn.

XXII.

"'Tis he!" the stranger cried, and those that heard
Re-echoed fast and far the whisper'd word.
"'Tis he!"—"'Tis who?" they question far and near,
Till louder accents rung on Lara's ear;

So widely spread, few bosoms well could brook
The general marvel, or that single look;
But Lara stirr'd not, changed not, the surprise
That sprung at first to his arrested eyes
Seem'd now subsided, neither sunk nor rais'd
Glanced his eye round, though still the stranger gaz'd;
And drawing nigh, exclaim'd, with haughty sneer,
"'Tis he!—how came he thence?—what doth he here?"

XXIII.

It were too much for Lara to pass by
Such question, so repeated fierce and high;
With look collected, but with accent cold,
More mildly firm than petulantly bold,

He turn'd, and met the inquisitorial tone—
"My name is Lara!—when thine own is known,
"Doubt not my fitting answer to requite
"The unlook'd for courtesy of such a knight.
"'Tis Lara!—further wouldst thou mark or ask?
"I shun no question, and I wear no mask."

"Thou shun'st no question! Ponder—is there none
"Thy heart must answer, though thine ear would shun?
"And deem'st thou me unknown too? Gaze again!
"At least thy memory was not given in vain.
"Oh! never canst thou cancel half her debt,
"Eternity forbids thee to forget."
With slow and searching glance upon his face
Grew Lara's eyes, but nothing there could trace

They knew, or chose to know—with dubious look
He deign'd no answer, but his head he shook,
And half contemptuous turn'd to pass away;
But the stern stranger motioned him to stay.
" A word!—I charge thee stay, and answer here
" To one, who, wert thou noble, were thy peer,
" But as thou wast and art—nay, frown not, lord,
" If false, 'tis easy to disprove the word—
" But, as thou wast and art, on thee looks down,
" Distrusts thy smiles, but shakes not at thy frown.
" Art thou not he? whose deeds——"
" Whate'er I be,
" Words wild as these, accusers like to thee
" I list no further; those with whom they weigh
" May hear the rest, nor venture to gainsay
" The wondrous tale no doubt thy tongue can tell,
" Which thus begins so courteously and well.

"Let Otho cherish here his polish'd guest,
"To him my thanks and thoughts shall be expressed."
And here their wondering host hath interposed—
"Whate'er there be between you undisclosed,
"This is no time nor fitting place to mar
"The mirthful meeting with a wordy war.
"If thou, Sir Ezzelin, hast ought to show
"Which it befits Count Lara's ear to know,
"To-morrow, here, or elsewhere, as may best
"Beseem your mutual judgment, speak the rest;
"I pledge myself for thee, as not unknown, 471
"Though like Count Lara now return'd alone
"From other lands, almost a stranger grown;
"And if from Lara's blood and gentle birth
"I augur right of courage and of worth,
"He will not that untainted line belie,
"Nor aught that knighthood may accord deny."

"To-morrow be it," Ezzelin replied,
"And here our several worth and truth be tried;
"I gage my life, my falchion to attest
"My words, so may I mingle with the blest!"
What answers Lara? to its centre shrunk
His soul, in deep abstraction sudden sunk;
The words of many, and the eyes of all
That there were gather'd seem'd on him to fall;
But his were silent, his appear'd to stray
In far forgetfulness away—away—
Alas! that heedlessness of all around
Bespoke remembrance only too profound.

XXIV.

"To-morrow!—ay, to-morrow!" further word
Than those repeated none from Lara heard;

Upon his brow no outward passion spoke,
From his large eye no flashing anger broke;
Yet there was something fix'd in that low tone
Which show'd resolve, determined, though unknown.
He seiz'd his cloak—his head he slightly bow'd,
And passing Ezzelin he left the crowd;
And, as he pass'd him, smiling met the frown
With which that chieftain's brow would bear him down:
It was nor smile of mirth, nor struggling pride
That curbs to scorn the wrath it cannot hide;
But that of one in his own heart secure
Of all that he would do, or could endure.
Could this mean peace? the calmness of the good?
Or guilt grown old in desperate hardihood?
Alas! too like in confidence are each
For man to trust to mortal look or speech;

From deeds, and deeds alone, may he discern
Truths which it wrings the unpractised heart to learn.

XXV.

And Lara called his page, and went his way—
Well could that stripling word or sign obey:
His only follower from those climes afar
Where the soul glows beneath a brighter star;
For Lara left the shore from whence he sprung,
In duty patient, and sedate though young;
Silent as him he served, his faith appears
Above his station, and beyond his years.
Though not unknown the tongue of Lara's land,
In such from him he rarely heard command;
But fleet his step, and clear his tones would come,
When Lara's lip breath'd forth the words of home:

Those accents as his native mountains dear,
Awake their absent echoes in his ear,
Friends', kindreds', parents', wonted voice recall,
Now lost, abjured, for one—his friend, his all:
For him earth now disclosed no other guide;
What marvel then he rarely left his side?

XXVI.

Light was his form, and darkly delicate
That brow whereon his native sun had sate,
But had not marr'd, though in his beams he grew,
The cheek where oft the unbidden blush shone through;
Yet not such blush as mounts when health would show
All the heart's hue in that delighted glow;
But 'twas a hectic tint of secret care
That for a burning moment fevered there;

And the wild sparkle of his eye seemed caught
From high, and lightened with electric thought,
Though its black orb those long low lashes fringe,
Had tempered with a melancholy tinge;
Yet less of sorrow than of pride was there,
Or if 'twere grief, a grief that none should share:
And pleased not him the sports that please his age,
The tricks of youth, the frolics of the page,
For hours on Lara he would fix his glance,
As all forgotten in that watchful trance;
And from his chief withdrawn, he wandered lone,
Brief were his answers, and his questions none;
His walk the wood, his sport some foreign book;
His resting-place the bank that curbs the brook:
He seemed, like him he served, to live apart
From all that lures the eye, and fills the heart;

To know no brotherhood, and take from earth
No gift beyond that bitter boon—our birth.

XXVII.

If aught he loved, 'twas Lara; but was shown
His faith in reverence and in deeds alone;
In mute attention; and his care, which guessed
Each wish, fulfilled it ere the tongue expressed.
Still there was haughtiness in all he did,
A spirit deep that brook'd not to be chid;
His zeal, though more than that of servile hands,
In act alone obeys, his air commands;
As if 'twas Lara's less than *his* desire
That thus he served, but surely not for hire.
Slight were the tasks enjoined him by his lord,
To hold the stirrup, or to bear the sword;

To tune his lute, or if he willed it more,
On tomes of other times and tongues to pore;
But ne'er to mingle with the menial train,
To whom he showed nor deference nor disdain,
But that well-worn reserve which proved he knew
No sympathy with that familiar crew:
His soul, whate'er his station or his stem,
Could bow to Lara, not descend to them.
Of higher birth he seemed, and better days,
Nor mark of vulgar toil that hand betrays,
So femininely white it might bespeak
Another sex, when matched with that smooth cheek.
But for his garb, and something in his gaze,
More wild and high than woman's eye betrays;
A latent fierceness that far more became
His fiery climate than his tender frame:

True, in his words it broke not from his breast,
But from his aspect might be more than guessed.
Kaled his name, though rumour said he bore
Another ere he left his mountain-shore;
For sometimes he would hear, however nigh,
That name repeated loud without reply,
As unfamiliar, or, if roused again,
Start to the sound, as but remembered then;
Unless 'twas Lara's wonted voice that spake,
For then, ear, eyes, and heart would all awake.

XXVIII.

He had looked down upon the festive hall,
And marked that sudden strife so marked of all;
And when the crowd around and near him told
Their wonder at the calmness of the bold,

Their marvel how the high-born Lara bore
Such insult from a stranger, doubly sore,
The colour of young Kaled went and came,
The lip of ashes, and the cheek of flame;
And o'er his brow the dampening heart-drops threw
The sickening iciness of that cold dew
That rises as the busy bosom sinks
With heavy thoughts from which reflection shrinks.
Yes—there be things that we must dream and dare,
And execute ere thought be half aware:
Whate'er might Kaled's be, it was enow
To seal his lip, but agonise his brow.
He gazed on Ezzelin till Lara cast
That sidelong smile upon the knight he passed;
When Kaled saw that smile his visage fell,
As if on something recognized right well;

His memory read in such a meaning more
Than Lara's aspect unto others wore,
Forward he sprung—a moment, both were gone,
And all within that hall seemed left alone;
Each had so fix'd his eye on Lara's mien,
All had so mix'd their feelings with that scene,
That when his long dark shadow through the porch
No more relieves the glare of yon high torch,
Each pulse beats quicker, and all bosoms seem
To bound as doubting from too black a dream,
Such as we know is false, yet dread in sooth,
Because the worst is ever nearest truth.
And they are gone—but Ezzelin is there,
With thoughtful visage and imperious air;
But long remain'd not; ere an hour expired
He waved his hand to Otho, and retired.

XXIX.

The crowd are gone, the revellers at rest;
The courteous host, and all-approving guest,
Again to that accustomed couch must creep
Where joy subsides, and sorrow sighs to sleep,
And man o'er-laboured with his being's strife,
Shrinks to that sweet forgetfulness of life:
There lie love's feverish hope, and cunning's guile,
Hate's working brain, and lull'd ambition's wile,
O'er each vain eye oblivion's pinions wave,
And quench'd existence crouches in a grave.
What better name may slumber's bed become?
Night's sepulchre, the universal home,
Where weakness, strength, vice, virtue, sunk supine,
Alike in naked helplessness recline:

Glad for awhile to heave unconscious breath,
Yet wake to wrestle with the dread of death,
And shun, though day but dawn on ills increased,
That sleep, the loveliest, since it dreams the least.

CANTO II.

LARA.

CANTO II.

I.

Night wanes—the vapours round the mountains curl'd
Melt into morn, and Light awakes the world.
Man has another day to swell the past,
And lead him near to little, but his last;
But mighty Nature bounds as from her birth.
The sun is in the heavens, and life on earth;
Flowers in the valley, splendour in the beam,
Health on the gale, and freshness in the stream.

Immortal man! behold her glories shine,
And cry, exulting inly, "they are thine!"
Gaze on, while yet thy gladdened eye may see,
A morrow comes when they are not for thee;
And grieve what may above thy senseless bier,
Nor earth nor sky will yield a single tear;
Nor cloud shall gather more, nor leaf shall fall,
Nor gale breathe forth one sigh for thee, for all;
But creeping things shall revel in their spoil,
And fit thy clay to fertilize the soil.

II.

'Tis morn—'tis noon—assembled in the hall,
The gathered chieftains come to Otho's call;
'Tis now the promised hour that must proclaim
The life or death of Lara's future fame.

When Ezzelin his charge may here unfold,
And whatsoe'er the tale, it must be told.
His faith was pledged, and Lara's promise given,
To meet it in the eye of man and heaven.
Why comes he not? Such truths to be divulged,
Methinks the accuser's rest is long indulged.

III.

The hour is past, and Lara too is there,
With self-confiding, coldly patient air;
Why comes not Ezzelin? The hour is past,
And murmurs rise, and Otho's brow's o'ercast.
"I know my friend! his faith I cannot fear,
"If yet he be on earth, expect him here;
"The roof that held him in the valley stands
"Between my own and noble Lara's lands;

"My halls from such a guest had honour gain'd,
"Nor had Sir Ezzelin his host disdain'd,
"But that some previous proof forbade his stay,
"And urged him to prepare against to-day;
"The word I pledged for his I pledge again,
"Or will myself redeem his knighthood's stain."

He ceased—and Lara answer'd, "I am here
"To lend at thy demand a listening ear;
"To tales of evil from a stranger's tongue,
"Whose words already might my heart have wrung,
"But that I deem'd him scarcely less than mad,
"Or, at the worst, a foe ignobly bad.
"I know him not—but me it seems he knew
"In lands where—but I must not trifle too:
"Produce this babbler—or redeem the pledge;
"Here in thy hold, and with thy falchion's edge."

Proud Otho on the instant, reddening, threw
His glove on earth, and forth his sabre flew.
" The last alternative befits me best,
" And thus I answer for mine absent guest."
With cheek unchanging from its sallow gloom,
However near his own or other's tomb;
With hand, whose almost careless coolness spoke,
Its grasp well-used to deal the sabre-stroke;
With eye, though calm, determined not to spare,
Did Lara too his willing weapon bare.
In vain the circling chieftains round them closed,
For Otho's phrenzy would not be opposed;
And from his lip those words of insult fell—
His sword is good who can maintain them well.

IV.

Short was the conflict, furious, blindly rash,
Vain Otho gave his bosom to the gash:
He bled, and fell; but not with deadly wound,
Stretched by a dextrous sleight along the ground.
"Demand thy life!" He answered not: and then
From that red floor he ne'er had risen again,
For Lara's brow upon the moment grew
Almost to blackness in its demon hue;
And fiercer shook his angry falchion now
Then when his foe's was levelled at his brow;
Then all was stern collectedness and art,
Now rose the unleavened hatred of his heart;
So little sparing to the foe he fell'd,
That when the approaching crowd his arm withheld,
He almost turned the thirsty point on those
Who thus for mercy dared to interpose;

But to a moment's thought that purpose bent,
Yet look'd he on him still with eye intent,
As if he loathed the ineffectual strife
That left a foe, howe'er o'erthrown, with life;
As if to search how far the wound he gave
Had sent its victim onward to his grave.

V.

They raised the bleeding Otho, and the Leech
Forbade all present question, sign, and speech;
The others met within a neighbouring hall,
And he, incensed and heedless of them all,
The cause and conqueror in this sudden fray,
In haughty silence slowly strode away;
He back'd his steed, his homeward path he took,
Nor cast on Otho's towers a single look.

VI.

But where was he? that meteor of a night,
Who menaced but to disappear with light?
Where was this Ezzelin? who came and went
To leave no other trace of his intent.
He left the dome of Otho long ere morn,
In darkness, yet so well the path was worn
He could not miss it; near his dwelling lay;
But there he was not, and with coming day
Came fast enquiry, which unfolded nought
Except the absence of the chief it sought.
A chamber tenantless, a steed at rest,
His host alarmed, his murmuring squires distressed:
Their search extends along, around the path,
In dread to meet the marks of prowlers' wrath:
But none are there, and not a brake hath borne
Nor gout of blood, nor shred of mantle torn;

Nor fall nor struggle hath defaced the grass,
Which still retains a mark where murder was;
Nor dabbling fingers left to tell the tale,
The bitter print of each convulsive nail,
When agonized hands that cease to guard,
Wound in that pang the smoothness of the sward.
Some such had been, if here a life was reft,
But these were not; and doubting hope is left;
And strange suspicion whispering Lara's name,
Now daily mutters o'er his blackened fame;
Then sudden silent when his form appeared,
Awaits the absence of the thing it feared
Again its wonted wondering to renew,
And dye conjecture with a darker hue.

VII.

Days roll along, and Otho's wounds are healed,
But not his pride; and hate no more concealed:
He was a man of power, and Lara's foe,
The friend of all who sought to work him woe,
And from his country's justice now demands
Account of Ezzelin at Lara's hands.
Who else than Lara could have cause to fear
His presence? who had made him disappear,
If not the man on whom his menaced charge
Had sate too deeply were he left at large?
The general rumour ignorantly loud,
The mystery dearest to the curious crowd;
The seeming friendlessness of him who strove
To win no confidence, and wake no love;
The sweeping fierceness which his soul betray'd,
The skill with which he wielded his keen blade;

Where had his arm unwarlike caught that art?
Where had that fierceness grown upon his heart?
For it was not the blind capricious rage
A word can kindle and a word assuage;
But the deep working of a soul unmix'd
With aught of pity where its wrath had fix'd;
Such as long power and overgorged success
Concentrates into all that's merciless:
These, link'd with that desire which ever sways
Mankind, the rather to condemn than praise,
'Gainst Lara gathering raised at length a storm,
Such as himself might fear, and foes would form,
And he must answer for the absent head
Of one that haunts him still, alive or dead.

VIII.

Within that land was many a malcontent,
Who cursed the tyranny to which he bent;
That soil full many a wringing despot saw,
Who worked his wantonness in form of law;
Long war without and frequent broil within
Had made a path for blood and giant sin,
That waited but a signal to begin
New havock, such as civil discord blends,
Which knows no neuter, owns but foes or friends;
Fixed in his feudal fortress each was lord,
In word and deed obeyed, in soul abhorr'd.
Thus Lara had inherited his lands,
And with them pining hearts and sluggish hands;
But that long absence from his native clime
Had left him stainless of oppression's crime.

And now diverted by his milder sway,
All dread by slow degrees had worn away;
The menials felt their usual awe alone,
But more for him than them that fear was grown;
They deem'd him now unhappy, though at first
Their evil judgment augured of the worst,
And each long restless night and silent mood
Was traced to sickness, fed by solitude;
And though his lonely habits threw of late
Gloom o'er his chamber, cheerful was his gate;
For thence the wretched ne'er unsoothed withdrew,
For them, at least, his soul compassion knew.
Cold to the great, contemptuous to the high,
The humble passed not his unheeding eye;
Much he would speak not, but beneath his roof
They found asylum oft, and ne'er reproof.

'And they who watched might mark that day by day,
Some new retainers gathered to his sway;
But most of late since Ezzelin was lost
He played the courteous lord and bounteous host:
Perchance his strife with Otho made him dread
Some snare prepared for his obnoxious head;
Whate'er his view, his favour more obtains
With these, the people, than his fellow thanes.
If this were policy, so far 'twas sound,
The million judged but of him as they found;
From him by sterner chiefs to exile driven
They but required a shelter, and 'twas given.
By him no peasant mourn'd his rifled cot,
And scarce the Serf could murmur o'er his lot;
With him old avarice found its hoard secure,
With him contempt forbore to mock the poor;

Youth present cheer and promised recompence
Detained, till all too late to part from thence:
To hate he offered with the coming change
The deep reversion of delayed revenge;
To love, long baffled by the unequal match,
The well-won charms success was sure to snatch.
All now was ripe, he waits but to proclaim
That slavery nothing which was still a name.
The moment came, the hour when Otho thought
Secure at last the vengeance which he sought:
His summons found the destined criminal
Begirt by thousands in his swarming hall,
Fresh from their feudal fetters newly riven,
Defying earth, and confident of heaven.
That morning he had freed the soil-bound slaves
Who dig no land for tyrants but their graves!

Such is their cry—some watchword for the fight;
Must vindicate the wrong, and warp the right:
Religion—freedom—vengeance—what you will,
A word's enough to raise mankind to kill;
Some factious phrase by cunning caught and spread
That guilt may reign, and wolves and worms be fed!

IX.

Throughout that clime the feudal chiefs had gain'd
Such sway, their infant monarch hardly reign'd;
Now was the hour for faction's rebel growth,
The Serfs contemn'd the one, and hated both:
They waited but a leader, and they found
One to their cause inseparably bound;
By circumstance compell'd to plunge again
In self-defence amidst the strife of men.

Cut off by some mysterious fate from those
Whom birth and nature meant not for his foes.
Had Lara from that night, to him accurst,
Prepared to meet, but not alone, the worst:
Some reason urged, whate'er it was, to shun
Enquiry into deeds at distance done;
By mingling with his own the cause of all,
E'en if he failed, he still delayed his fall.
The sullen calm that long his bosom kept,
The storm that once had spent itself and slept,
Roused by events that seemed foredoom'd to urge
His gloomy fortunes to their utmost verge,
Burst forth, and made him all he once had been,
And is again; he only changed the scene.
Light care had he for life, and less for fame,
But not less fitted for the desperate game:

He deem'd himself mark'd out for other's hate,
And mock'd at ruin so they shared his fate.
What cared he for the freedom of the crowd?
He raised the humble but to bend the proud.
He had hoped quiet in his sullen lair,
But man and destiny beset him there:
Inured to hunters he was found at bay,
And they must kill, they cannot snare the prey.
Stern, unambitious, silent, he had been
Henceforth a calm spectator of life's scene;
But dragg'd again upon the arena, stood
A leader not unequal to the feud;
In voice—mien—gesture—savage nature spoke,
And from his eye the gladiator broke.

X.

What boots the oft-repeated tale of strife,
The feast of vultures, and the waste of life?
The varying fortune of each separate field,
The fierce that vanquish, and the faint that yield?
The smoking ruin, and the crumbled wall?
In this the struggle was the same with all;
Save that distempered passions lent their force
In bitterness that banished all remorse.
None sued, for Mercy knew her cry was vain,
The captive died upon the battle-slain:
In either cause one rage alone possessed
The empire of the alternate victor's breast;
And they that smote for freedom or for sway
Deem'd few were slain, while more remain'd to slay.
It was too late to check the wasting brand,
And Desolation reaped the famished land;

The torch was lighted, and the flame was spread,
And Carnage smiled upon her daily dead.

XI.

Fresh with the nerve the new-born impulse strung,
The first success to Lara's numbers clung;
But that vain victory hath ruined all,
They form no longer to their leader's call;
In blind confusion on the foe they press,
And think to snatch is to secure success.
The lust of booty, and the thirst of hate
Lure on the broken brigands to their fate;
In vain he doth whate'er a chief may do
To check the headlong fury of that crew;
In vain their stubborn ardour he would tame,
The hand that kindles cannot quench the flame;

The wary foe alone hath turn'd their mood,
And shown their rashness to that erring brood:
The feign'd retreat, the nightly ambuscade,
The daily harass, and the fight delayed,
The long privation of the hoped supply,
The tentless rest beneath the humid sky,
The stubborn wall that mocks the leaguer's art,
And palls the patience of his baffled heart,
Of these they had not deem'd: the battle-day
They could encounter as a veteran may;
But more preferred the fury of the strife,
And present death to hourly suffering life:
And famine wrings, and fever sweeps away
His numbers melting fast from their array;
Intemperate triumph fades to discontent,
And Lara's soul alone seems still unbent:

But few remain to aid his voice and hand,
And thousands dwindled to a scanty band:
Desperate, though few, the last and best remain'd
To mourn the discipline they late disdain'd.
One hope survives, the frontier is not far,
And thence they may escape from native war;
And bear within them to the neighbouring state
An exile's sorrows, or an outlaw's hate:
Hard is the task their father land to quit,
But harder still to perish or submit.

XII.

It is resolved—they march—consenting Night
Guides with her star their dim and torchless flight;
Already they perceive its tranquil beam
Sleep on the surface of the barrier stream;

Already they descry—Is yon the bank?
Away! 'tis lined with many a hostile rank.
Return or fly!—What glitters in the rear?
'Tis Otho's banner—the pursuer's spear!
Are those the shepherds' fires upon the height?
Alas! they blaze too widely for the flight:
Cut off from hope, and compass'd in the toil,
Less blood perchance hath bought a richer spoil!

XIII.

A moment's pause, 'tis but to breathe their band,
Or shall they onward press, or here withstand?
It matters little—if they charge the foes
Who by the border-stream their march oppose,
Some few, perchance, may break and pass the line,
However link'd to baffle such design.

"The charge be ours! to wait for their assault
"Were fate well worthy of a coward's halt."
Forth flies each sabre, reined is every steed,
And the next word shall scarce outstrip the deed:
In the next tone of Lara's gathering breath
How many shall but hear the voice of death!

XIV.

His blade is bared, in him there is an air
As deep, but far too tranquil for despair;
A something of indifference more than then
Becomes the bravest if they feel for men—
He turned his eye on Kaled, ever near,
And still too faithful to betray one fear;
Perchance 'twas but the moon's dim twilight threw
Along his aspect an unwonted hue

Of mournful paleness, whose deep tint expressed
The truth, and not the terror of his breast.
This Lara mark'd, and laid his hand on his:
It trembled not in such an hour as this;
His lip was silent, scarcely beat his heart,
His eye alone proclaim'd, "We will not part!
"Thy band may perish, or thy friends may flee,
"Farewell to life, but not adieu to thee!"

The word hath pass'd his lips, and onward driven
Pours the link'd band through ranks asunder riven;
Well has each steed obeyed the armed heel,
And flash the scimitars, and rings the steel;
Outnumber'd not outbrav'd, they still oppose
Despair to daring, and a front to foes;
And blood is mingled with the dashing stream,
Which runs all redly till the morning beam.

XV.

Commanding, aiding, animating all,
Where foe appeared to press, or friend to fall,
Cheers Lara's voice, and waves or strikes his steel,
Inspiring hope, himself had ceased to feel.
None fled, for well they knew that flight were vain,
But those that waver turn to smite again
While yet they find the firmest of the foe
Recoil before their leader's look and blow;
Now girt with numbers, now almost alone,
He foils their ranks, or reunites his own;
Himself he spared not—once they seemed to fly—
Now was the time, he waved his hand on high,
And shook—why sudden droops that plumed crest?
The shaft is sped—the arrow's in his breast!
That fatal gesture left the unguarded side,
And Death hath stricken down yon arm of pride.

The word of triumph fainted from his tongue;
That hand, so raised, how droopingly it hung!
But yet the sword instinctively retains,
Though from its fellow shrink the falling reins;
These Kaled snatches: dizzy with the blow,
And senseless bending o'er his saddle-bow,
Perceives not Lara that his anxious page
Beguiles his charger from the combat's rage:
Meantime his followers charge, and charge again;
Too mix'd the slayers now to heed the slain!

XVI.

Day glimmers on the dying and the dead,
The cloven cuirass, and the helmless head;
The war-horse masterless is on the earth,
And that last gasp hath burst his bloody girth;

And near yet quivering with what life remain'd,
The heel that urg'd him and the hand that rein'd;
And some too near that rolling torrent lie,
Whose waters mock the lip of those that die;
That panting thirst which scorches in the breath
Of those that die the soldier's fiery death,
In vain impels the burning mouth to crave
One drop—the last—to cool it for the grave;
With feeble and convulsive effort swept
Their limbs along the crimson'd turf have crept;
The faint remains of life such struggles waste,
But yet they reach the stream, and bend to taste:
They feel its freshness, and almost partake—
Why pause?—No further thirst have they to slake—
It is unquench'd, and yet they feel it not;
It was an agony—but how forgot!

XVII.

Beneath a lime, remoter from the scene,
Where but for him that strife had never been,
A breathing but devoted warrior lay:
'Twas Lara bleeding fast from life away.
His follower once, and now his only guide,
Kneels Kaled watchful o'er his welling side,
And with his scarf would staunch the tides that rush
With each convulsion in a blacker gush;
And then as his faint breathing waxes low,
In feebler, not less fatal tricklings flow:
He scarce can speak, but motions him 'tis vain,
And merely adds another throb to pain.
He clasps the hand that pang which would assuage,
And sadly smiles his thanks to that dark page
Who nothing fears, nor feels, nor heeds, nor sees,
Save that damp brow which rests upon his knees;

Save that pale aspect, where the eye, though dim,
Held all the light that shone on earth for him.

XVIII.

The foe arrives, who long had search'd the field,
Their triumph nought till Lara too should yield;
They would remove him, but they see 'twere vain,
And he regards them with a calm disdain,
That rose to reconcile him with his fate,
And that escape to death from living hate;
And Otho comes, and leaping from his steed,
Looks on the bleeding foe that made him bleed,
And questions of his state; he answers not,
Scarce glances on him as on one forgot,
And turns to Kaled:—each remaining word,
They understood not, if distinctly heard;

His dying tones are in that other tongue,
To which some strange remembrance wildly clung.
They spake of other scenes, but what—is known
To Kaled, whom their meaning reach'd alone;
And he replied, though faintly, to their sound,
While gaz'd the rest in dumb amazement round:
They seem'd even then—that twain—unto the last
To half forget the present in the past;
To share between themselves some separate fate,
Whose darkness none beside should penetrate.

XIX.

Their words though faint were many—from the tone
Their import those who heard could judge alone;
From this, you might have deem'd young Kaled's death
More near than Lara's by his voice and breath,

So sad, so deep, and hesitating broke
The accents his scarce-moving pale lips spoke;
But Lara's voice though low, at first was clear
And calm, till murmuring death gasp'd hoarsely near:
But from his visage little could we guess,
So unrepentant, dark, and passionless,
Save that when struggling nearer to his last,
Upon that page his eye was kindly cast;
And once as Kaled's answering accents ceas'd,
Rose Lara's hand, and pointed to the East:
Whether (as then the breaking sun from high
Roll'd back the clouds) the morrow caught his eye
Or that 'twas chance, or some remember'd scene
That rais'd his arm to point where such had been,
Scarce Kaled seem'd to know, but turn'd away,
As if his heart abhorred that coming day,

And shrunk his glance before that morning light
To look on Lara's brow—where all grew night.
Yet sense seem'd left, though better were its loss;
For when one near display'd the absolving cross,
And proffered to his touch the holy bead
Of which his parting soul might own the need,
He look'd upon it with an eye profane,
And smiled—Heaven pardon! if 'twere with disdain;
And Kaled though he spoke not, nor withdrew
From Lara's face his fix'd despairing view,
With brow repulsive, and with gesture swift,
Flung back the hand which held the sacred gift,
As if such but disturbed the expiring man,
Nor seem'd to know his life but *then* began,
The life immortal, infinite, secure,
To all for whom that cross hath made it sure!

XX.

But gasping heav'd the breath that Lara drew,
And dull the film along his dim eye grew;
His limbs stretch'd fluttering, and his head droop'd o'er
The weak yet still untiring knee that bore;
He press'd the hand he held upon his heart—
It beats no more, but Kaled will not part
With the cold grasp, but feels, and feels in vain,
For that faint throb which answers not again.
"It beats!"—Away, thou dreamer! he is gone—
It once was Lara which thou look'st upon.

XXI.

He gaz'd, as if not yet had pass'd away
The haughty spirit of that humble clay;

And those around have rous'd him from his trance,
But cannot tear from thence his fixed glance;
And when in raising him from where he bore
Within his arms the form that felt no more,
He saw the head his breast would still sustain,
Roll down like earth to earth upon the plain:
He did not dash himself thereby, nor tear
The glossy tendrils of his raven hair,
But strove to stand and gaze, but reel'd and fell,
Scarce breathing more than that he lov'd so well.
Than that *he* lov'd! Oh! never yet beneath
The breast of man such trusty love may breathe!
That trying moment hath at once reveal'd
The secret long and yet but half-conceal'd;
In baring to revive that lifeless breast,
Its grief seem'd ended, but the sex confest,

And life return'd, and Kaled felt no shame—
What now to her was Womanhood or Fame?

XXII.

And Lara sleeps not where his fathers sleep,
But where he died his grave was dug as deep;
Nor is his mortal slumber less profound,
Though priest nor bless'd, nor marble deck'd the mound;
And he was mourn'd by one whose quiet grief
Less loud, outlasts a people's for their chief.
Vain was all question ask'd her of the past,
And vain e'en menace—silent to the last;
She told nor whence nor why she left behind
Her all for one who seem'd but little kind.
Why did she love him? Curious fool!—be still—
Is human love the growth of human will?

To her he might be gentleness; the stern
Have deeper thoughts than your dull eyes discern,
And when they love, your smilers guess not how
Beats the strong heart, though less the lips avow.
They were not common links that form'd the chain
That bound to Lara Kaled's heart and brain;
But that wild tale she brook'd not to unfold,
And seal'd is now each lip that could have told.

XXIII.

They laid him in the earth, and on his breast,
Besides the wound that sent his soul to rest,
They found the scatter'd dints of many a scar
Which were not planted there in recent war;
Where'er had pass'd his summer years of life
It seems they vanish'd in a land of strife;

But all unknown his glory or his guilt,
These only told that somewhere blood was spilt,
And Ezzelin, who might have spoke the past,
Return'd no more—that night appear'd his last.

XXIV.

Upon that night (a peasant's is the tale)
A Serf that cross'd the intervening vale,
When Cynthia's light almost gave way to morn,
And nearly veil'd in mist her waning horn;
A Serf, that rose betimes to thread the wood,
And hew the bough that bought his children's food,
Pass'd by the river that divides the plain
Of Otho's lands and Lara's broad domain:
He heard a tramp—a horse and horseman broke
From out the wood—before him was a cloak

Wrapt round some burthen at his saddle-bow,
Bent was his head, and hidden was his brow.
Rous'd by the sudden sight at such a time,
And some foreboding that it might be crime,
Himself unheeded watch'd the stranger's course,
Who reach'd the river, bounded from his horse,
And lifting thence the burthen which he bore,
Heav'd up the bank, and dash'd it from the shore,
Then paused, and look'd, and turn'd, and seem'd to watch,
And still another hurried glance would snatch,
And follow with his step the stream that flow'd,
As if even yet too much its surface show'd:
At once he started, stoop'd, around him strown
The winter floods had scatter'd heaps of stone:
Of these the heaviest thence he gather'd there,
And slung them with a more than common care.

Meantime the Serf had crept to where unseen
Himself might safely mark what this might mean;
He caught a glimpse, as of a floating breast,
And something glittered starlike on the vest,
But ere he well could mark the buoyant trunk,
A massy fragment smote it, and it sunk:
It rose again but indistinct to view,
And left the waters of a purple hue,
Then deeply disappear'd: the horseman gaz'd
Till ebbed the latest eddy it had rais'd;
Then turning, vaulted on his pawing steed,
And instant spurr'd him into panting speed.
His face was mask'd—the features of the dead,
If dead it were, escaped the observer's dread;
But if in sooth a star its bosom bore,
Such is the badge that knighthood ever wore,

And such 'tis known Sir Ezzelin had worn
Upon the night that led to such a morn.
If thus he perish'd, Heaven receive his soul!
His undiscover'd limbs to ocean roll;
And charity upon the hope would dwell
It was not Lara's hand by which he fell.

XXV.

And Kaled—Lara—Ezzelin, are gone,
Alike without their monumental stone!
The first, all efforts vainly strove to wean
From lingering where her chieftain's blood had been;
Grief had so tam'd a spirit once too proud,
Her tears were few, her wailing never loud;
But furious would you tear her from the spot
Where yet she scarce believ'd that he was not,

Her eye shot forth with all the living fire
That haunts the tigress in her whelpless ire;
But left to waste her weary moments there,
She talk'd all idly unto shapes of air,
Such as the busy brain of Sorrow paints,
And woos to listen to her fond complaints:
And she would sit beneath the very tree
Where lay his drooping head upon her knee;
And in that posture where she saw him fall,
His words, his looks, his dying grasp recall;
And she had shorn, but sav'd her raven hair,
And oft would snatch it from her bosom there,
And fold, and press it gently to the ground,
As if she staunch'd anew some phantom's wound.
Herself would question, and for him reply;
Then rising, start, and beckon him to fly

From some imagin'd spectre in pursuit;
Then seat her down upon some linden's root,
And hide her visage with her meagre hand,
Or trace strange characters along the sand—
This could not last—she lies by him she lov'd;
Her tale untold—her truth too dearly prov'd.

END OF LARA.

JACQUELINE,

A TALE.

PART I.

When Spring bursts forth in blossoms through the vale,
And her wild music triumphs on the gale,
Oft with my book I muse from stile to stile;
Oft in my porch the listless noon beguile,
Framing base numbers.

JACQUELINE.

I.

'Twas Autumn; thro' Provence had ceased
The vintage, and the vintage-feast.
The sun had set behind the hill,
The moon was up, and all was still,
And from the Convent's neighbouring tower
The clock had tolled the midnight hour.
When Jacqueline came forth alone,
Her kerchief o'er her tresses thrown;

A guilty thing and full of fears,
Yet ah, how lovely in her tears!
She starts, and what has caught her eye?
What—but her shadow gliding by?
She stops, she pants; with lips apart
She listens—to her beating heart!
Then, thro' the scanty orchard stealing,
The clustering boughs her track concealing,
She flies, nor casts a thought behind,
But gives her terrors to the wind;
Flies from her home, the humble sphere
Of all her joys and sorrows here,
Her father's house of mountain-stone,
And by a mountain-vine o'ergrown.
At such an hour in such a night,
So calm, so clear, so heavenly bright,

Who would have seen and not confessed
It looked as all within were blest?
What will not woman, when she loves?
Yet lost, alas, who can restore her?—
She lifts the latch, the wicket moves;
And now the world is all before her.

Up rose St. Pierre, when morning shone;
—And Jacqueline, his child, was gone!
Oh what the madd'ning thought that came?
Dishonour coupled with his name!
By Condé at Rocroy he stood;
By Turenne, when the Rhine ran blood.
Two banners of Castile he gave
Aloft in Notre Dame to wave;
Nor did thy cross, St. Louis, rest
Upon a purer, nobler breast.

He slung his old sword by his side,
And snatched his staff and rushed to save;
Then sunk—and on his threshold cried
"Oh lay me in my grave!
"—Constance! Claudine! where were ye then?
"But stand no there. Away! away!
"Thou, Frederic, by thy father stay.
"Though old, and now forgot of men,
"Both must not leave him in a day."
Then, and he shook his hoary head,
"Unhappy in thy youth!" he said.
"Call as thou wilt, thou call'st in vain;
"No voice sends back thy name again.
"To mourn is all thou hast to do;
"Thy play-mate lost, and teacher too."

And who but she could soothe the boy,
Or turn his tears to tears of joy?
Long had she kissed him as he slept,
Long o'er his pillow hung and wept;
And, as she passed her father's door,
She stood as she would stir no more.
But she is gone, and gone for ever!
No, never shall they clasp her—never.
They sit and listen to their fears;
And he, who thro' the breach had led
Over the dying and the dead,
Shakes if a cricket's cry he hears!

Oh! she was good as she was fair.
None—none on earth above her!
As pure in thought as angels are,
To know her was to love her.

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When little, and her eyes, her voice,
Her every gesture said "rejoice,"
Her coming was a gladness;
And, as she grew, her modest grace,
Her down-cast look 'twas heav'n to trace,
When, shading with her hand her face,
She half inclined to sadness.
Her voice, whate'er she said, enchanted;
Like music to the heart it went.
And her dark eyes—how eloquent!
Ask what they would, 'twas granted.
Her father loved her as his fame;
—And Bayard's self had done the same!

Soon as the sun the glittering pane
On the red floor in diamonds threw,

His songs she sung and sung again,
Till the last light withdrew.
Every day, and all day long,
He mused or slumbered to a song.
But she is dead to him, to all!
Her lute hangs silent on the wall;
And on the stairs, and at the door
Her fairy-step is heard no more!
At every meal an empty chair
Tells him that she is not there;
She, who would lead him where he went,
Charm with her converse while he leant;
Or hovering every wish prevent;
At eve light up the chimney-nook,
Lay there his glass within his book;

And that small chest of curious mould,
(Queen Mab's, perchance, in days of old,)
Tusk of elephant and gold;
Which, when a tale is long, dispenses
Its fragrant dust to drowsy senses.
In her who mourned not, when they missed her,
The old a child, the young a sister?
No more the orphan runs to take
From her loved hand the barley-cake.
No more the matron in the school
Expects her in the hour of rule,
To sit amid the elfin brood,
Praising the busy and the good.
The widow trims her hearth in vain.
She comes not—nor will come again;
Not now, his little lesson done,
With Frederic blowing bubbles in the sun;

Nor spinning by the fountain side,
Some story of the days of old,
Barbe Bleue or Chaperon Rouge half-told
To him who would not be denied:
Not now, to while an hour away,
Gone to the falls in Valombrè,
Where 'tis night at noon of day;
Nor wandering up and down the wood,
To all but her a solitude,
Where once a wild deer, wild no more,
Her chaplet on his antlers wore,
And at her bidding stood.

PART II.

II.

The day was in the golden west;
And, curtained close by leaf and flower,
The doves had cooed themselves to rest
In Jacqueline's deserted bower;
The doves—that still would at her casement feed,
And in her walks had ever fluttered round
With purple feet and shining neck,
True as the echo to the sound.
That casement, underneath the trees,
Half open to the western breeze,

Looked down, enchanting Garonnelle,
Thy wild and mulberry-shaded dell,
Round which the Alps of Piedmont rose,
The blush of sunset on their snows:
While, blithe as lark on summer-morn,
When green and yellow waves the corn,
When harebells blow in every grove,
And thrushes sing "I love! I love!"
Within (so soon the early rain
Scatters, and 'tis fair again;
Though many a drop may yet be seen
To tell us where a cloud has been)
Within lay Frederic, o'er and o'er
Building castles on the floor,
And feigning, as they grew in size,
New troubles and new dangers;

With dimpled cheeks and laughing eyes,
As he and Fear were strangers.

St. Pierre sate by, nor saw nor smiled.
His eyes were on his lov'd Montaigne;
But every leaf was turned in vain.
Then in that hour remorse he felt,
And his heart told him he had dealt
Unkindly with his child.
A father may awhile refuse;
But who can for another chuse?
When her young blushes had revealed
The secret from herself concealed,
Why promise what her tears denied,
That she should be De Courcy's bride?
—Wouldst thou, presumptuous as thou art,
O'er Nature play the tyrant's part.

And with the [illegible]
Oh rather, rather hope to bind
The ocean-wave, the mountain-wind;
Or fix thy foot upon the ground
To stop the planet rolling round.

The light was on his face; and there
You might have seen the passions driv'n—
Resentment, Pity, Hope, Despair—
Like clouds across the face of Heav'n.
Now he sighed heavily; and now,
His hand withdrawing from his brow,
He shut the volume with a frown,
To walk his troubled spirit down:
—When Manchon, that had snuffed the ground,
And sought and sought, but never found,

Leapt up and to the casement flew,
And looked and barked and vanished thro'.
"'Tis Jacqueline! 'tis Jacqueline!"
Her little brother laughing cried.
"I know her by her kirtle green,
"She comes along the mountain-side;
"Now turning by the traveller's seat,—
"Now resting in the hermit's cave,—
"Now kneeling, where the pathways meet,
"To the cross on the stranger's grave.
"And, by the soldier's cloak, I know
"(There, there along the ridge they go)
"D'Arcy, the gentle and the brave!
"Look up—why will you not?" he cries,
His rosy hands before his eyes;

For on that incense-breathing eve
The sun shone out, as loth to leave.
" See—to the rugged rock she clings!
" She calls, she faints, and D'Arcy springs;
" D'Arcy so dear to us, to all;
" Who, for you told me on your knee,
" When in the fight he saw you fall,
" Saved you for Jacqueline and me!"

And true it was! The mournful night
That on the village-green they parted,
The lilied banners streaming bright
O'er maids and mothers broken-hearted;
The drum—it drowned the last adieu,
When D'Arcy from the crowd she drew.
" One charge I have; and one alone,
" Nor that refuse to take,

" My father—if not for his own,
" Oh for his daughter's sake!"
Inly he vowed—'twas all he could;
And went and sealed it with his blood.

Nor can ye wonder. When a child,
And in her playfulness she smiled,
Up many a ladder-path* he guided
Where meteor-like the chamois glided,
Thro' many a misty grove.
They loved—but under Friendship's name;
And Reason, Virtue fanned the flame,
Till in their houses Discord came,
And 'twas a crime to love.

* Called in the language of the country *Pas-de-l'Echelle.*

Then what, alas, was Jacqueline to do?
Her father's angry [illegible] she knew,
And when to soothe, and when persuade;
But now her path De Courcy crossed,
Led by his falcon thro' the glade—
He turned, beheld, admired the maid;
And all her little arts were lost!
De Courcy, lord of Argentiere!
Thy poverty, thy pride, St. Pierre,
Thy thirst for vengeance sought the snare.
The day was named, the guests invited;
The bride-groom, at the gate, alighted;
When up the windings of the dell
A pastoral pipe was heard to swell,
And lo, an humble Piedmontese,
Whose music might a lady please,

This message thro' the lattice bore,
(She listened, and her trembling frame
Told her at once from whom it came)
"Oh let us fly—to part no more!"

PART III.

III.

THAT morn ('twas in Ste. Julienne's cell,
As at Ste. Julienne's sacred well
Their dream of bliss began)
That morn, ere many a star was set,
Their hands had on the altar met
Before the holy man.
—And now the village gleams at last;
The woods, the golden meadows passed,
Where, when, Toulouse, thy splendour shone,

The Troubadour would journey on
Transported—or, from grove to grove,
Framing some roundelay of love,
Wander till the day was gone.
" All will be well, my Jacqueline!
" Oh tremble not—but trust in me.
" The Good are better made by Ill,
" As odours crushed are sweeter still;
" And gloomy as thy past has been,
" Bright shall thy future be!"
So saying, thro' the fragrant shade,
Gently along he led the maid,
While Manchon round and round her played:
And, as that silent glen they leave,
Where by the spring the pitchers stand,
Where glow-worms light their lamps at eve,

And fairies dance—in fairy-land,
From every cot above, below,
They gather as they go—
Sabot, and coif, and collerette,
The house-wife's prayer, the grandam's blessing;
Girls that adjust their locks of jet,
And look and look and linger yet,
The lovely bride caressing;
Babes that had learnt to lisp her name,
And heroes he had led to fame.

But what felt D'Arcy, when at length
Her father's gate was open flung?
Ah, then he found a giant's strength;
For round him, as for life, she clung!
And when, her fit of weeping o'er,

Onward they moved a little space,
And saw an old man sitting at the door,
Saw his wan cheek, and sunken eye
That seem'd to gaze on vacancy,
Then, at the sight of that beloved face,
At once to fall upon his neck she flew;
But—not encouraged—back she drew,
And trembling stood in dread suspense,
Her tears her only eloquence!
All, all—the while—an awful distance keeping;
Save D'Arcy, who nor speaks nor stirs;
And one, his little hand in hers,
Who weeps to see his sister weeping.

Then Jacqueline the silence broke,
She clasped her father's knees and spoke,

Her brother kneeling too;
While D'Arcy as before looked on,
Tho' from his manly cheek was gone
Its natural hue.
" His praises from your lips I heard,
" Till my fond heart was won;
" And, if in aught his Sire has erred,
" Oh turn not from the Son!—
" She, whom in joy, in grief you nursed;
" Who climbed and called you father first,
" By that dear name conjures—
" On her you thought—but to be kind!
" When looked she up, but you inclined?
" These things, for ever in her mind,
" Oh are they gone from yours?
" Two kneeling at your feet behold;

" One—one how young;—nor yet the other old.
" Oh spurn them not—nor look so cold—
" If Jacqueline be cast away,
" Her bridal be her dying day.
" Well, well might she believe in you!—
" She listened, and she found it true."

He shook his aged locks of snow;
And thrice he turned, and rose to go.
She hung; and was St. Pierre to blame,
If tears and smiles together came?
" Oh no—begone! I'll hear no more!"
But, as he spoke, his voice relented.
" That very look thy mother wore
" When she implored, and old Le Roc consented.
" True, I have done—have done and suffered wrong;
" Yet once I loved him as my own.

"—Nor canst thou, D'Arcy, feel resentment long;
"For she herself shall plead, and I atone.
"Henceforth," he paused awhile, unmann'd; 340
For D'Arcy's tears bedewed his hand;
"Let each meet each as friend to friend,
"All things by all forgot, forgiv'n,
"And that dear Saint—may she once more descend
"To make our home a heav'n!
"But now, in my hands, yours with hers unite.
"A father's blessing on your heads alight!
"Nor let the least be sent away.
"All hearts shall sing 'Adieu to Sorrow!'
"St. Pierre has found his child to-day; 350
"And old and young shall dance to-morrow."

Had Louis* then before the gate dismounted,
Lost in the chase at set of sun;
Like Henry, when he heard recounted†
The generous deeds himself had done,
(That night the miller's maid Colette
Sung, while he supped, her chansonnette)
Then—when St. Pierre addressed to [illegible]
Then had the monarch with a sigh confessed
A joy by him unsought and unpossessed,
—Without it what are all the rest?—
To love, and to be loved again.

* Louis the Fourteenth.

† Alluding to a popular story related of Henry the Fourth of France, similar to ours of "The King and Miller of Mansfield."

THE END.

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Government of Maharashtra
on 04 January, 2016